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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001521

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. NEULING  
SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO AMBASSADOR,S TOUGH TALK

REF: REFTEL: HARARE 1418

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

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Summary  
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1. (SBU) The Ambassador,s speech on November 2 on the causes of Zimbabwe,s economic decline has generated a wide array of media coverage within Zimbabwe. These accounts range from factual portrayals and enthusiastic endorsement in the independent press to sensationalized calls for the Ambassador,s expulsion in the state-controlled papers. The GOZ has yet to formally respond to the speech. End Summary.

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Independent Media Trumpet Message  
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2. (SBU) Zimbabwe,s independent media were the first to report on the Ambassador,s speech. The reporting was factual and the editorials echoed the Ambassador,s criticism of GOZ economic policies. The Independent, which is heavily critical of GOZ policies, carried both an article that quoted directly from the speech and an editorial in support of the Ambassador,s statements. The editorial, entitled "Running out of scapegoats for failure," characterized the Ambassador's comments as "irrefutable" and "the strongest rebuttal to date by a foreign envoy of government's claims that Zimbabwe's economic decline is a result of drought and sanctions. It added that "it was refreshing to have the envoy of the world,s largest economy speak out on the dishonesty Zimbabweans are fed everyday by their politicians and state media."

3. (SBU) The Financial Gazette, which has been increasingly critical of the GOZ on economic matters in recent months, also carried a factual story that quoted heavily from the speech. The independent online source, ZimOnline, published the entire speech. Meanwhile, in a piece entitled "Dell fires another salvo", the Standard on November 6 reported the Ambassador,s comments at the unveiling of a \$35 million HIV/AIDS project, including a quote that bad government economic policies were undermining the battle against the pandemic.

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State Media Vilify Messenger  
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4. (SBU) The government-controlled media responded over the weekend, a delay likely caused by the need to coordinate the coverage with State House, launched ad hominem attacks on the Ambassador. In a front page story entitled "US envoy, governor in public showdown", the semi-independent ruling party-aligned Daily Mirror on November 4 reported on Manicaland governor Tinaye Chigudu,s rejoinder to the Ambassador,s speech. Although the article did carry some quotes from the speech, it gave prime billing to Chigudu,s statements, such as that "the message I have got from Dell is that Zimbabweans must go and try to revolt against and overthrow the government." (N.B. The press account did not mention the jeering given by the students after this statement.)

5. (SBU) In the November 5 state-controlled Herald, columnist "Nathaniel Manheru" (widely regarded as Ministry of Information PermSec George Charamba) embarked on a series of personal attacks against the Ambassador, including a disparaging reference to the incident several weeks ago at the botanical garden (reftel). The article ignored the substance of the Ambassador's speech.

6. (SBU) The Daily Mirror continued its slanted coverage on Sunday November 6, when the paper quoted an unnamed source at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who stated that President Mugabe planned to summon the Ambassador this week to explain his "undiplomatic behavior." The article stated that the Ambassador made his speech despite "glaring evidence" that sanctions and drought had caused the economic decline. The

state-controlled Herald on November 7 warned in a front page article that the Ambassador risked being expelled for his continued meddling in the internal affairs of Zimbabwe.<sup>8</sup> However, the article also signaled a possible climb down by the GOZ, noting that it was the Foreign Minister who would now call in the Ambassador and ending with the threat that he might be subjected to the same treatment as former British Ambassador Donnelly and put under "open surveillance."

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Comment  
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17. (C) The independent media and the vast majority of post,s contacts have embraced the Ambassador,s remarks. In addition, given the enthusiastic response of the students at African University and the many unsolicited man on the street<sup>8</sup> expressions of appreciation, the Ambassador appears to have struck a nerve with the Zimbabwean public. The GOZ has been unable to withstand a true portrayal of the abysmal state of affairs that it has created in Zimbabwe or to counter the substance of the Ambassador,s speech. Instead, the official media have turned to personal attacks in an attempt to distract public attention. Meanwhile, the government has painted itself into a corner with its threat of expulsion - backing down now would be a sign of weakness, while following through would undermine its efforts to rehabilitate its image internationally and re-engage international financial institutions and others.

DELL